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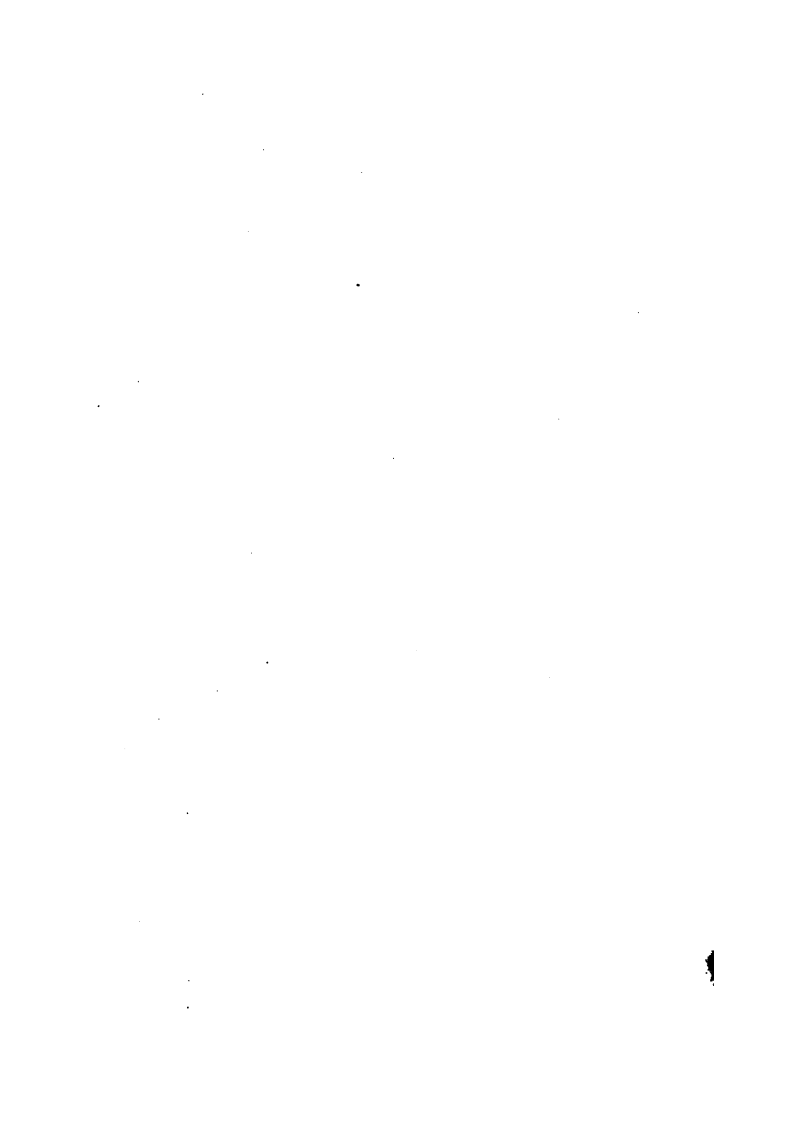
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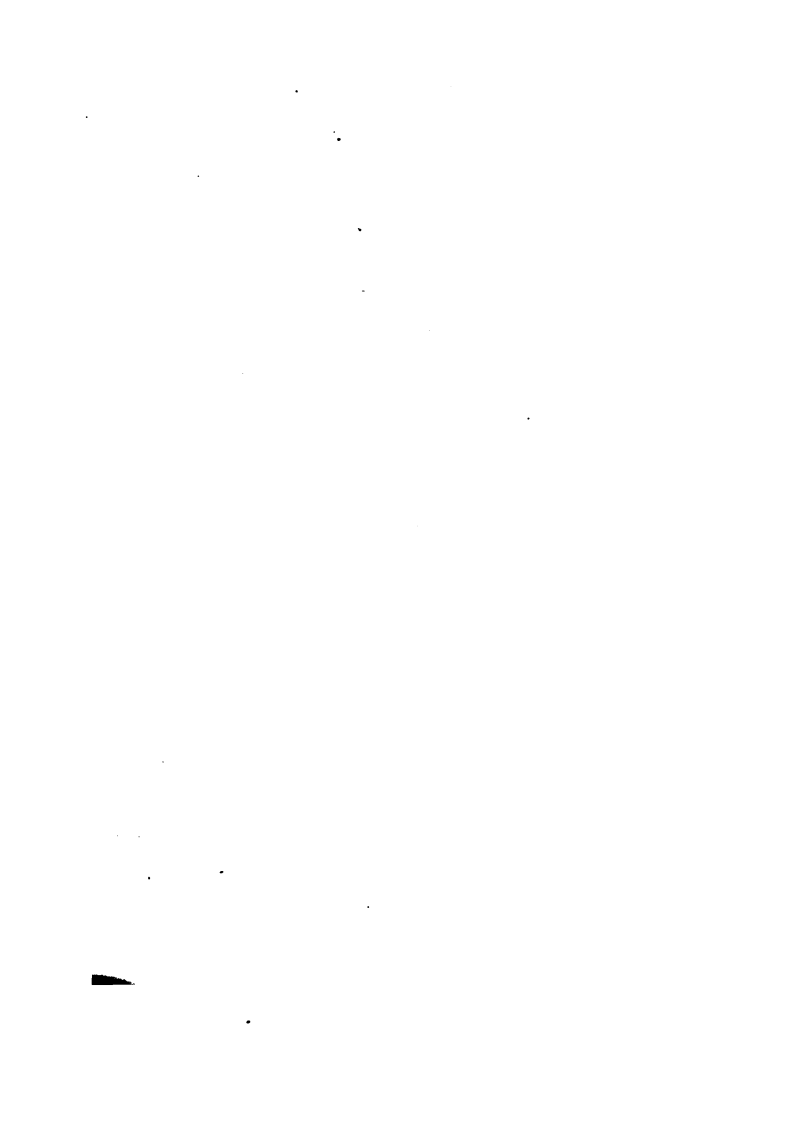


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CHRISTMAS EVE,
AND
NEW YEAR'S EVE.

BY
AMY CAMPBELL.

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CHRISTMAS EVE.



CHAPTER I.

DEAR children, did you ever hear of the Harz Mountains? They are not in Great Britain, not in England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales; they are in Germany. How well do I remember them! Not barren, sterile, and rugged in their beauty, like some of the mountains of Scotland; but fertile and graceful, clothed with the varying tints of fir, beech, and oak. Then from their heights one can see the little picturesque villages, with their red-tiled roofs, dotted here and there over the landscape, nestling into the valleys like loving children seeking for rest, and so shut in by the mountains that they seem to form little kingdoms of themselves, and dreamily to let life go on. Ah! a passing sunbeam lets us catch a

glimpse of the rivers which now and then wind their way, like silver threads, through valleys and villages, murmuring softly to the mountain peasants strange tales and legends of those old mountains—of the witches who still dance in weird-like confusion, of the steed who sprang across a deep gulf, from mountain to mountain, leaving on one of them the impression of its hoof, which can never be effaced.

They have also true stories to tell—of the old German kings, who built fortresses and defended themselves against the attacks of the foe; of the robber chiefs, who, from their high towers, whence they could overlook the surrounding countries, used to pounce upon the wayfarers, rob and plunder them.

You boys would like to hear about a good skirmish. Well, perhaps some other day, when I have time; but I have wandered too far already, for I wanted to tell you the story of little Gretchen Härtel, whose home is in one of those little villages I mentioned before as nestling into a valley.

Gretchen Härtel is the daughter of the

village schoolmaster, and she has never known any other home than the little red-tiled house, with the wooded mountains rising behind it, a silvery river flowing in front, spanned by a little rustic bridge, which forms the means of communication between the schoolmaster's house and the rest of the village.

The schoolmaster is a very important personage in this small community. He is the village oracle. The man who has saved a little money carefully communicates it to Herr Härtel, and begs him to tell him ways and means of laying it out in the most profitable manner. The mother who has received a letter from her son, far away in business, comes to Herr Härtel to have many passages read and explained. The child who has dirtied her clean pinafore seeks out the schoolmaster to act as her mediator. On all such occasions where his advice is sought, Herr Härtel adjusts his spectacles, crosses his arms over his dusty coat, sits down to consider the matter in hand, and after due consideration returns his verdict.

But he is a different person when, 180 children having plodded their way homewards across the little bridge, school and consultations over, he enters the small sitting-room, where supper is spread on the round table, and Gretchen his only child, with hair smoothed and a clean pinafore on, anxiously waits for the well-known step on the stairs. Then the spectacles are taken off, the dusty coat laid aside for a larger and more comfortable one, the feet thrust into slippers, Gretchen's smooth head patted, and all sit down with good appetite to the fare spread before them—potatoes in their skins, Harz cheese and butter, a huge loaf of black bread, and a large pewter jug full of beer.

Little is spoken during the meal, the clattering of knives and forks tells that all are busy. Frau Härtel now and then speaks in undertones to the servant-maid sitting next her (a stout strongly-built girl, with coarse features, and a mass of thick black hair tightly drawn off her face, and twined with black velvet into a massive coil at the back) *about the next day's* cleaning, baking, or

washing, but so low as not to disturb her husband, whom she seems to hold in great reverence.

The meal ended, Frau Härtel and the servant begin clearing away, making more clatter than such an occasion warrants. Herr Härtel, however, seems quite accustomed to it, and does not mind. He has been furnished with his ever dear companion, a long pipe, reaching to the ground, and seated in an immense arm-chair near the stove, he puffs away, totally regardless of the clouds of smoke that quickly fill the apartment.

It was in the beginning of December, the weather was piercingly cold, snow lay thick on the ground, and covered the mountains with a hard, crisp, glistening carpet. All the lakes and the ponds in the district were thickly frozen over with ice, and many feared that soon the murmuring river would be stopped in its peaceful course, and detained prisoner by the fetters of "King Frost."

But in Herr Härtel's little sitting-room little of the cold is felt. The double shutters have been securely closed, and the stove

sends out such a glow that it bids defiance to wind and weather.

"Only three weeks to Christmas Eve," says Herr Härtel, puffing away at his pipe, and looking at Gretchen, who by the light of the lamp knits away at an interminable grey stocking, her little fingers looking as if they could hardly grasp the four long thin wires.

"Well, Gretel, what do you think the Christchild will bring you?"

Gretchen's face brightens up all over.

"Oh, father, I know! I know!" she cries, laying down her stocking and clapping her hands.

"The mother has promised me a beautiful green stuff dress, like that Mariechen Schmidt used to wear, and a picture-book, and gingerbread, and apples, and nuts. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I wish Christmas Eve were here to-morrow. Don't you, father? And then think of the beautiful tree, with the lights. The mother says I may have a small one this year, all to myself, with seven *lights on it*, because I am seven years old.

What do you think the Christchild will bring you, father?"

Without answering her question Herr Härtel looked at her, and said, "How should you like the Christchild to bring you a little brother or sister?"

Gretchen's face fell, and she took up the neglected knitting again, and pouted.

"I don't want a little brother or a little sister. I want to be your and the mother's little Gretchen. Oh, father!" looking up, as if some new dread had seized her, "You haven't asked the Christchild to bring me a little brother or sister. Oh, no! don't! don't!" she cried, with vehemence, and ran and hid her face in his lap. "Tell me you haven't."

"I don't know," her father answered, with a perplexed face. "Think of having a nice little playfellow always to be with you."

"No, no," cried Gretchen, "I would hate it. I wouldn't give it any of my apples or nuts, and it shouldn't see the lights on the Christmas tree. Don't you love me any more, father? Do you want to have

another little child instead of your little Gretchen?" and the sobs came thick and fast.

"Hush, Gretchen! Tuts, Kindchen! How could I love any little child better than you? Now, wipe your tears;" then, changing the subject, "How should you like to go and pay a visit to the grandmother?"

In a moment the tears were dried, and Gretchen's blue eyes sparkled.

"Go and see the grandmother, who lives in the next village, and who said I should come and see her little house one day! Father, am I to go and see the grandmother?"

"Yes, Gretchen, if you are a good girl."

"Soon, father?"

"Well, let me see. What should you say to going there to-morrow; it is Saturday? There is no school, and I will drive you over in the sledge."

"Oh, father! father! does the mother know we are to go to-morrow? Does the grandmother know we are coming? Shall I *really* see her little house, where you used

to live, and shall we drive there in the beautiful green sledge, with the tinkling bells?"

On Gretchen rattled, never tired of asking questions, and Herr Härtel never tired of answering them. Very unwilling was she to go to bed at all, only her father said if she slept quickly, the next day would come sooner, and when at last she laid her little head down on the pillow she was so tired that she fell fast asleep directly, and never heard the answer to a question she had asked her mother, "May I put on my Sunday dress to go and visit the grandmother?"

CHAPTER II.

"GRETCHEN ! Gretchen !" called her mother. "Gretchen, it is time to get up."

Gretchen sat up and rubbed her eyes. She had been dreaming of a beautiful sledge with tinkling bells, and thought she was sitting in it, with her father and mother driving along a road cut in the mountains, and all the trees she saw were Christmas trees, shining with a thousand tapers. On one her own name was written, "For the little Gretchen Härtel ;" and just as she was going to jump out of the sledge to see if the green stuff dress was anywhere she heard the Christchild calling her "Gretchen ; Gretchen !" Then she rubbed her eyes, and saw her mother bending over her, and the tinkling sledge, and all the Christmas trees had disappeared.

"Gretchen," her mother said, "you must get up quickly ; the sledge will be here in *an hour*, and you have still to be dressed,


and get your breakfast. Don't you remember, child, you are going to the grandmother's?" for Gretchen was still rubbing her eyes in a bewildered kind of manner. But as soon as her mother mentioned her grandmother's name, up she sprang, crying, "Oh, mother! and shall I really see the grandmother to-day?"

It took a long time to dress her that morning. She was so excited she could hardly sit still while her mother plaited her hair in two tails, and tied the ends with red ribbon. Then the Sunday dress had to be adjusted, a performance which was always a trial of patience to the little girl, and was doubly so this morning. When at length the important toilette was performed Frau Härtel led Gretchen to the sitting-room, where the fragrant smell of coffee greeted them as they entered. Herr Härtel was already seated at the breakfast table, appeasing his hunger with hunches of black bread and butter, and a huge bowl of steaming coffee.

"Why, Gretchen, how smart you look

this morning!" he exclaimed, as she entered; "but come, be quick and take your breakfast, the sledge will be here in a minute."

"Don't hurry her so, father, there is plenty of time," Frau Härtel said, as she poured into a little white and green porcelain cup, bearing the word "Gretchen" on it in black letters, a steaming portion of coffee and hot milk, sugar being an unheard-of luxury at breakfast. Gretchen's excitement did not seem to take away her appetite, for she managed to finish several slices of the large loaf, and two cups of coffee. When she had finished Frau Härtel proceeded to unlock a cupboard, standing in one corner of the room, out of which she produced a thickly wadded tartan pelisse, and a little red cashmere hood, studded with beads. "Now, Gretchen," she said, "you must mind and take great care of your things," and when the kind mother had finished dressing her little daughter she kissed her on her little round fat cheeks, and slipped a large apple *and a piece of gingerbread* into her pocket.



"The sledge is at the door," announced Herr Härtel.

"Mother, you are not ready yet," Gretchen exclaimed.

"I am not going, dear," Frau Härtel answered, but was not prepared for the outburst that followed. Gretchen declared she would not go if her mother did not accompany them. She wept, she entreated, she clung to Frau Härtel's dress. You must not judge her too hardly; remember it was her first visit away from home. At length Herr Härtel bethought himself of a plan.

"Very well, Gretchen, as there is only room in the sledge for two, the mother and I will go, and you can remain at home, and keep house alone."

"I could sit on mother's knee. Are you sure there's only room for two?"

"Come down and see," her father said, and Gretchen consented to accompany him to the front door.

There stood the most beautiful of little sledges, painted bright green, with just one seat in front and one behind. It was drawn

by a little white pony, which neighed impatiently to be off, and every time it shook its shaggy head two little bells gave a clear sharp tinkle that sounded most inviting.

"You see, Gretchen," her father said, "there is only room for two."

"Yes, father," looking wistfully at the sledge, and longing to be in it.

"I had better take it away again. The mother does not care to drive to-day, and you do not want to go to the grandmother's. Come away, Fritz!" and he went to the pony's head. Gretchen could contain herself no longer.

"Stop, father, let me have a little, drive first, and then we can come back to mother."

"Very well," Herr Härtel said, nodding complacently to his wife, and lifted Gretchen in, taking himself the driver's front seat. Off the little vehicle dashed; tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, went the bells; crack, crack, the pony's hoofs on the frosty road. The hoary trees gleamed and sparkled in the sunlight, and Gretchen, warm and cosy in her thick *pelisse*, clapped her hands with glee.

Herr Härtel often turned round from his perch to speak to his little girl, but never mentioned her grandmother's name. Once he asked, gravely, "Shall we go back now, Gretchen?" but she only said, "Oh! please a little further," so on they drove.

"Father, do look at that poor boy," suddenly exclaimed Gretchen from the back seat, where she was contentedly nibbling at a large apple. Herr Härtel, who was trotting the pony leisurely, so as to give it a rest, looked in the direction indicated, and saw a poor boy, with tattered clothes and no hat on, standing near a stile, looking up and down in a forlorn kind of manner.

"Poor little fellow! I will ask him what is the matter," said the good-natured school-master, and stopping the pony he beckoned to the poor boy, who came forward immediately, and then Gretchen saw that he looked cold and pinched.

"What is your name, little boy?" asked Herr Härtel."

"Hans, sir. Hans Schmidt."

"Poor little Hans Schmidt! what are you doing here?"

"I am going to my aunt's," the boy said. "Father and mother are both dead. Father died last week, and he told me before he died that when he was buried I was to go to my aunt's. I have walked for two days, and slept in a barn last night. My money is almost all gone, and I don't think I shall ever reach her."

"Where does she live?" asked the school-master. The boy gave the name of a village.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Herr Härtel, "you are in luck this morning; we are just driving there. Gretchen, if you make yourself very small I think you will find there is room for two such little people. Get in, my boy."

Gretchen's face did not look altogether pleased. She did not approve of the poor badly-clad boy sharing one seat with her neat little person, so she drew in her dress, and did not vouchsafe to notice the remarks her father now and then addressed to them *both*.

Herr Härtel saw his little girl was out of humour, but he thought it wisest to leave her alone, aware that the little chatterbox would not long bear to remain silent, and he had judged rightly. She began first by making remarks to her father in an injured tone, but at last almost forgot the cause of her anger, and found it pleasanter to converse as usual. The great step, however, to final reconciliation with her little companion consisted in drawing from the depths of her pocket her gingerbread cake, and dividing the tempting morsel into two parts. She handed one of them to the boy, with, "You can eat that, boy, if you are hungry."

Over the gingerbread they grew friendly, and Herr Härtel chuckled to himself as he heard the two children in the back seat chatting away, and even growing quite confidential. Gretchen confided to Hans her hopes with regard to the Christchild's generosity, and Hans in his turn told her, not without a few tears, that his father had promised him a pair of skates, but that now he was dead he did not think he should get

any presents, for he had heard his aunt was very poor. "Poor Hans!" said sympathising little Gretchen.

They had by this time entered the village, and Herr Härtel stopped the sledge.

"Now Hans, my boy," he said, "I don't know where your aunt lives, but I should think you had not very far to go now. You had better jump out, and ask your way."

So little Hans jumped out, and trudged on his way, not, however, before first having thanked the kind schoolmaster. Then Herr Härtel turned the pony's head, and drove up a snowy path to a large white stone house, in front of which was a courtyard, where everyone seemed busy. A groom was rubbing down a fine fat horse in front of the stable, a girl was feeding the poultry, and the coachman was cleaning the wheels of a carriage.

"Oh, father! grandmother cannot surely live here," Gretchen exclaimed, in an awe-struck voice, as she gazed at the big white stone house.

Herr Härtel laughed heartily. "The

grandmother live here ! No, I should think not. This is Herr Löbbecke, the great proprietor's house, and I used to work on his farm when I was a little boy. The grandmother lives in a little cottage outside the gate, and takes care of the poultry here."

By this time they were driving along a snowy path through the court, and Herr Härtel exchanged greetings with those of the labourers he knew. A little boy ran and opened a large gate ; through it they drove, and then stopped before the dearest little cottage you can imagine. It was only two stories high, with a roof of red tiles. The windows were Gothic-shaped, with small diamond panes. In summer and autumn the vine clambered all over the cottage, but now it lay rolled up in straw on the ground, so that King Frost might not harm it. There was a small strip of garden in front of the house, where flowers used to blossom in summer ; but now a pure white covering lay stretched over it, and a little bird was hopping about, trying in vain to find some food. As soon as the sledge stopped the door

opened, and the prettiest ornament of the cottage appeared—an old woman of about sixty, with such a gentle, loving face, and smooth white hair, brushed back under a high, snow-white cap, with crimped frilled border. She had on a thick brown woollen dress, a white handkerchief folded across her bosom, and round her waist was tied a huge kitchen apron, that almost reached to her feet. Down the little garden-path she tripped, and exclaimed as she opened the wicket-gate, “Welcome, welcome, my son; welcome, welcome, my dear little Gretchen; so you have come to see your old grandmother at last!” Then, turning to her son again, “You are later than I expected. I thought you would have been here half an hour ago; but, now, come into the warm room, and get something to eat, you must be hungry.”

“I shall just put the sledge up,” Herr Härtel said, “but Gretchen can go with you.”

Gretchen had by this time removed the thick shawl that her mother had tucked round her feet, and began to scramble out *of the sledge*. Her grandmother kissed the

little red cheek, glowing with the frosty air, and then taking the small hand in hers, led her to the cottage. Gretchen almost lost her tongue in wonder and admiration when introduced to the parlour. The white porcelain stove, with the figure of an angel on it, was so much prettier than the great iron one at home. The old-fashioned, polished, high-backed chairs, with table and huge cupboard to correspond, looked so much more imposing than the simple deal furniture at home. The Gothic windows, shaded with bright red curtains, looked so cozy; and the canary bird, chirping gaily, looked so bright and pretty in its green cage near the window. On the table was spread a plentiful repast of bread, cheese, butter, sausage, rolls, and coffee; also beer, for those that preferred it. The kind old grandmother now proceeded to undo Gretchen's cloak and hood, and by this time Herr Härtel had come in, and they all sat down to the good cheer provided for them. As dinner was to be at one, and it was now only a little past eleven, Gretchen had a long time to examine the

marvels of the house—the grandmother's bedroom, full of all kinds of curiosities that Gretchen longed to examine, but as yet felt too shy to ask for permission to do so; the neat little closet opening off it, where stood a tiny bed, one chair, a small chest of drawers, and a washhand-stand—these assigned to herself during her stay at the cottage; two attics upstairs, now only filled with lumber, but where her father and his brothers had slept when they were little boys. This rambling through the pretty cottage had an indescribable charm for Gretchen. But what delighted her most of all was the tiny little kitchen behind the parlour—the floor so beautifully clean and white, strewn with sand, the table and dresser scrubbed till not a speck of dust was to be seen, the dish covers hanging up on nails along the wall, and polished till they were as bright as looking-glasses; then the white plates, of all different sizes, with blue rims round them, arranged on shelves with scrupulous order. All delighted Gretchen, and she was quite *disappointed* when the dinner-bell put a

stop to further investigations. But in the afternoon a new treat awaited her. Having changed her Sunday dress for a common brown stuff one, with her sleeves tucked up, and an apron tied-on that covered her from head to foot, she was established in the kitchen with Hannah the maid-of-all-work, and there helped, or rather hindered, her in making the usual amount of cakes for Sunday. Up went the little fat arms into the bowl filled with flour, and there, according to Hannah's directions, dabbed, mixed, and kneaded. Great was her joy when Hannah took the little tin forms, and pouring the mixture of eggs, flour, sugar, and butter into them, proceeded to range them in neat little rows inside the bake-oven.

"When will they be ready, Hannah?" she cried; "When will they be ready?" and kept opening the stove-door and peeping in every few minutes, till at last even Hannah's good-nature was exhausted.

"No, Gretchen," she said; "cakes don't bake at that rate, and looking at them won't *make* them quicker about it, I can tell you."

You would be of far more use if you would help me to prepare the supper. First of all, the dishes have to be washed." So she provided Gretchen with a large bowl of water and a clean towel, and went herself to look after the cooking of the supper.

Gretchen was a neat, tidy little body, and had often helped her mother at home to wash up, so she proved herself here of more real assistance than she had been at the cake baking. Then she went with Hannah to the parlour to help to lay the cloth. Her grandmother and father were busy talking; but as soon as she entered they stopped, and her father turned to her and asked what she had been doing with herself, and laughed when she said she had been helping Hannah to bake cakes.

"What will the mother say," he exclaimed, "when she hears her little Gretchen can bake cakes?"

After supper Gretchen began to yawn and look tired, so as she had had a long day of *it* her grandmother took her off to bed. *When the white sheets had been cozily*

tucked round her, the grandmother stooped to give her a kiss; but Gretchen now missed her mother, and began to sob audibly, till the good old grandmother, guessing the cause, slipped away, but soon returned with a large doll.

"See here, Gretchen," she said; "here is a poor child who has no mamma: won't you put her to sleep?"

"Where is her mamma?" asked Gretchen.

"She was my little girl once," said the grandmother, and a soft tear stole into her eye; "but she has gone to the dear God in the sky."

"Had you a little girl once?" asked Gretchen.

"Yes, dear, just like you. She was called Gretchen, too, and used to sleep in this little bed."

Gretchen had never cared for dolls, but she somehow, after hearing the grandmother's story, seemed to love this one; so she took it in her arms, and hugged it tightly, singing herself and it to sleep with a little *German* song.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning, when Gretchen woke, she found her grandmother standing near her bedside. Up she jumped, and, with some assistance, was soon ready. When she came into the parlour her father met her, just rising from his breakfast, with his great coat on and his hat in his hand.

"Where are you going, father?" she asked.

"To see your mother," answered Herr Härtel.

"Am I going, too?"

"No; I want you to stay and take care of your grandmother."

There was no outburst, as her father had expected. She only answered quietly, "Very well; I will take care of grannie and of my child" (looking at the doll); "when I want to go back you'll fetch me in the sledge?"

"Of course," laughed Herr Härtel, very

much relieved by the way she took matters. "I couldn't do long without this little round face" (patting her cheek); "but I must be off."

Gretchen took his hand, and went with him to the front door, where the pretty green sledge was standing waiting. He kissed Gretchen and his mother, waved his hat, and was off.

"Now, Gretchen, come and have some breakfast," her grandmother said, when the sledge had disappeared through Herr Löbbecke's great gates. So in they went, and presently, when Gretchen was sipping her coffee, she burst out with, "Grandmother, I am sure my child was born in England!"

"Why?" asked the old woman, knowing she referred to the doll.

"Because," said Gretchen, "all English ladies have long curls. We have a picture of one in our sitting-room at home, and she has flaxen curls just like my child's. I mean to call her 'Miss.'"

"But you must call her something else besides 'Miss,' Gretchen."

"Very well, grannie. Tell me some English name."

"Will Mary do?" asked grannie.

"Oh, yes! Miss Mary; that sounds nice, but she must be christened."

"Very well, dear. When shall it be?"

"To-morrow afternoon will be time enough."

"But who will be the *Herr Pastor*?"

"I don't know yet, grandmother, but I shall see;" and there the conversation dropped.

After breakfast, dressed in her pelisse and hood, Gretchen accompanied her grandmother to the little village church.

It was a picture to see those two kneeling together: the bent form of the old woman, in her long, black mantle, reaching to her feet, the black, quilted hood surrounding her wrinkled, faded, gentle old face, and Gretchen's little upright figure, in the thick tartan pelisse, with the bright red hood, fitting closely to her round, ruddy face.

Gretchen hardly waited till they were *well out of the church*, when she exclaimed

“Oh ! grandmother, I know who will be the *Herr Pastor* !”

“What *Herr Pastor* ?”

“The *Herr Pastor* who is to christen my child. I saw him in church : Hans, the poor boy we met yesterday on the road. May I invite him to come to-morrow afternoon ?”

Grannie had heard from Herr Härtel the story of the poor boy, so she said, “Yes, Gretchen ; you may run and ask him if his aunt will allow him to come.”

Off Gretchen ran, and soon overtook Hans, who was walking by himself. “How do you do, Hans ?” said Gretchen, pulling at his sleeve.

How his face brightened when he saw the little girl ! She came with him as far as his aunt’s, and received permission to let him come on the following day.

So after dinner the next day all was prepared for the christening in the parlour. The table was spread with a red cloth, and a little bowl filled with water placed on it.

At three o’clock the guests came—Hans

in his old clothes, but these carefully brushed: he was now, also, no longer bare-foot, but had on stockings and a pair of old patched boots his aunt had given him. Then grannie had invited little Sophiechen Schmidt, a neighbour's child, who was neatly dressed in a blue frock, with a black silk apron. Lastly, there was little blind Wilhelm, the gardener's child, who loved to be with other children, although he could not see them. Grannie placed him in a little chair next the window, so that the warm sun might shine on him; and then Gretchen brought her doll, to let him feel it all over and know what his future godchild would be like, for he was to be the godfather. Sophiechen and grandmother were to be the godmothers, but there failed still a father. "I will be the father," said Hans, "and the *Herr Pastor* at the same time."

So it was agreed, and the doll received the name of "Miss Mary."

After the ceremony was concluded Wilhelm was left in grannie's charge, and *Gretchen* showed the others the wonders of

the house, and told them of her cake-baking. Sophiechen, in her turn, told how she helped to clean and iron every Saturday. Poor Hans had the least to tell.

When the children returned to the parlour they found a little feast spread for them, in honour of the child's christening. Plates of cake (the cake Gretchen had baked), apples and nuts, and steaming chocolate, to be drunk out of the pretty blue and white cups. Miss Mary sat beside Gretchen, and behaved very well.

Before the children left grannie called them all to her, and opening the old-fashioned spinet, played a hymn tune, to which they all sang a little hymn: in English it would run thus. Perhaps you children for whom I am writing this little story might like to know it too:—

“ Jesus, help me; I am weak,
A feeble, sinful child;
Jesus, help me, Thou who art
So good, so meek, so mild.

“ Jesus, love me, for I need
Thy precious, holy love;
Jesus, love Thy little child,
Smile on me from above.

“ Jesus, bless me every day,
Thy blessing is the best ;
Jesus, bless Thy little child,
In Thee alone is rest.”

When Gretchen lay down to sleep that night, with “Miss Mary” in her arms, a happy, peaceful feeling stole over her little heart, and she whispered gently to herself, “Jesus, bless Thy little child,” and then she fell asleep, and dreamt she was one of those happy children to whom Jesus said, “Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Grannie smiled when, some hours afterwards, she bent over the peaceful little face, so full of joy and thought ; it looked like the little Gretchen she used to Miss every night so long ago, but who was now safe in her Father’s arms, never again to be parted from Him.

CHAPTER IV.

It would be impossible, my dear children, to tell you what Gretchen did every day. She was very happy and busy; sometimes helping her grandmother to feed the poultry, at other times assisting Hannah in the kitchen, playing with "Miss Mary," or running about with Hans, who was now one of her fast friends. She was, nevertheless, beginning to long a little for home. A week before the day we speak of her father had come to see her, and had promised to return for her on Christmas Eve. "And when you come I have got a surprise for you," he had said: but he did not tell her what the surprise was, and Gretchen puzzled her little brain to think what it could be.

"So you are going to leave me too, Gretchen," her grandmother was saying to her the day before Christmas Eve, as the two, as usual, went on their morning round to feed the poultry.

"Yes, grandmother, but I'll soon come back again. Oh! I wonder what I shall get to-morrow. Fancy, grannie, Christmas Eve at last! Do you think the Christchild will not forget me?"

"No, I am sure He will not."


"Poor Hans," said Gretchen suddenly; "he won't have a very happy Christmas Eve. His aunt is so poor she can't give him anything, and he told me all about the happy Christmas Eves he used to have."

"Poor boy!" grannie said. "His father dead, too. His will indeed be a very sad Christmas Eve!"

"I wish he could get his skates," Gretchen continued, looking up very hard into the old woman's face; but grannie took no notice of the hint, so at last Gretchen came straight away to the point. "Grannie, couldn't *you* give him a pair?"

She thought she had made a brave effort for Hans, and was sure not to fail, for grannie was so kind to everyone; but this time she was disappointed.

"*No, Gretchen, I can't do that, child. A*



pair of skates costs a great deal of money; more than I could give this winter."

Tears came into Gretchen's eyes. An only child, she had gradually grown very selfish, but some little lessons grannie had taught her had sunk into her heart, and she had thought she would try and think a little more of others. This had been the first attempt, and it had failed—not even a word of praise for her thoughtfulness. She could not help showing her disappointment, and she pouted, while she answered, "I wish I were grown up, and had money, then I know what I would do."

"Tell me what you would do," grannie said.

"I would go right off to the next town in a sledge, and buy the most beautiful pair of skates that ever was seen, then I would wrap them up in paper, and on Christmas Eve I would send them to his house, and tell them to say the parcel came from the Christ-child. Oh, grannie! only think how he would stare and clap his hands when the paper was undone, and wonder how the

Christchild knew what he wanted; but he must wait till I am a grown-up woman, and then, perhaps," Gretchen said dolefully, "he won't care to have them."

"Child," said grannie, "you need not wait till you are an old woman; I have a little plan in my head. Do you know how much a little muff would cost? Just two thalers. I meant to have given you one for Christmas, but if you like it better I will buy Hans the skates instead, but it must be *either* the muff or the skates, not both. You see it has been a hard winter, and I cannot afford both. You shall decide which it shall be."

Gretchen did not, as most little girls would have done, hesitate a moment. An only child, she had been brought up so entirely to think of herself that the idea of sacrificing her own pleasure for another never struck her, so she answered promptly, "Oh, then, it must be the muff, of course; I have so longed for a new one. Hans cannot be disappointed, because he never thought *he should get a pair of skates.*"

“Very well,” grannie answered; “it shall be the muff, dear.”

She did not wish to force Gretchen to make the sacrifice, although she longed for her little grandchild to strive more to become a little lamb of the Lord Jesus Christ’s.

As they were sitting that evening together, grandmother and grandchild, the last evening they should spend together alone for so long, grannie in a big armchair near the window, with Gretchen, the child on her knee, in whose arms “Miss Mary” was nestling, Gretchen began:

“Oh, grannie, if you could only be with us to-morrow, it would be the happiest, happiest of days! Why is Christmas Eve such a happy day? I say a little hymn about happy, happy Christmas, and I know the Christchild brings presents; but to-day, when I said to you, ‘Grannie, won’t you be dull on Christmas Eve?’ you said, ‘No, child, I am never dull on *that* day; I have so much to think about,’ and yet you are quite alone here; I am sure I should be very unhappy.”

"Gretchen," grannie said, "I am going to tell you a little story, and then you will see why I am so happy on Christmas Eve. Are you quite comfortable, dear?"

"Yes, grannie; quite;" and Gretchen nestled into her grandmother's arms, to rest there peacefully, and hear one of those stories grannie was never tired of telling, and she never tired of listening to, and so the old woman began:—

"A great many hundred years ago some shepherds were watching their flocks on a plain. You have seen shepherds with their long staffs, and their faithful dogs often; but these shepherds did not live in Germany, but far, far away in a country you never saw. Well, all of a sudden, the sky got very bright—it had been dark, like to-night, with only a little twinkling star here and there, so you may imagine how surprised the shepherds were when it suddenly became so bright. They looked all around to see where the light came from, on all sides; but at last they looked above, and then they *saw that the sky* was filled with beautiful

shining creatures, called angels, who were singing a hymn of praise to God, and they said to the shepherds, 'Fear not, for God, who loves you, has sent His Son to help you to be good, and to-night He is born a long way off in a village called "Bethlehem."' The shepherds were very glad when they heard this, for they loved God, and they wished to be good, so they determined to go and see the little child that was born in Bethlehem, and that the angels had told them was God's Son.

"Now, there lived in Bethlehem a very good man and woman, called Joseph and Mary, and an angel had told Mary God would send her a little baby, and she was to call Him Jesus.

"One night Joseph and Mary came to an inn, and asked to be allowed to have a room there; but the man who kept the inn said, 'My house is quite full, I have not even *one* room to spare.' But Mary answered, 'Oh! put us anywhere you can, for we cannot go further to-night.' Then the landlord said, 'I have nothing but a stable to offer you.'

Mary and Joseph said they would go there. You know what a stable is like, where horses are put? and have you ever seen a manger? A manger is the place horses eat out of. Well, that very night God sent Mary her little baby, the little child Jesus; and they had no soft cradle to put Him into, so they had to lay him in a manger."

"Poor little child!" said Gretchen, with tears in her eyes. "Grannie, I wish Joseph and Mary had come to father's house, and the poor little baby would have got a soft, warm bed to sleep in."

Grannie made no remark, but went on:—

"Well, when the shepherds came to Bethlehem they knew where to find Jesus, for the angels had told them. So they went to the stable, and found the little child lying in a manger. Oh! they were so happy, because they knew God had sent this little child to teach them how to be good."

"And was He never naughty when He was a little child?" asked Gretchen, wonderingly.

"*No, darling; He loved God, His dear*

Father in heaven so much, He did everything He thought would please Him. He used to live up in the beautiful heaven with God; but to please Him, He came to us, here on earth; and had not a warm bed like you, but a rough pillow, and was very poor, and often hungry, and people instead of being kind to Him, and trying to make Him happy by doing what God wished them to do, used to say unkind things to Him, and be wicked and cruel."

"Grannie," said Gretchen softly, "if the dear Jesus would only come and live now I would try and do what He liked; and I don't think I should have been afraid of Him, for in my little room at home there is a picture of Him smiling, and all the little children are as near to Him as they can be; but perhaps they were very good children, and never naughty."

"No, Gretchen, I don't think children are ever never naughty; but I think Jesus would try and teach them how to be good. And, Gretchen darling, though Jesus does not live now, you can still do what He likes, and

treat Him kindly. Do you know what He said one day? that we were all His brothers and sisters, and that if we were kind to each other it would be just the same as if we were kind to Him. When the beggar came here the other day, and I gave him a piece of bread, it was just the same as if I had given the bread to Jesus."

"To-morrow is that dear Jesus' birthday; that is why we are all so happy. On your birthday you get presents, and have two candles burning; but on Jesus' birthday He gives us presents, and makes us happy."

"I wish I could give Jesus a present," sighed Gretchen, and then she was still for a very long time, and lay nestling in grannie's arms; but before she went to sleep that night she raised herself up in her little bed, and putting her arms round grannie's neck, whispered, "Grannie, if I let Hans have the skates, would I be giving them to Jesus?"

"Yes, darling; and Jesus would love His little sister so much for giving them to *Him*."

“Then, grannie, I think I had better do without my muff, and let Jesus have the skates.”

“God bless you, my child ; we will send them to Hans to-morrow.”

The sacrifice had been made ; but it cost Gretchen a tear or two under the bedclothes. And then she thought of Jesus smiling on her, because she was going to give Him something. And she fell asleep with a peaceful, happy expression on her face, hugging “Miss Mary” tightly in her arms.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS EVE came at last. The day was bright and beautiful, the ground crisp and hard, and the hoary trees shining like diamonds! What a happy day it brought to many, to most! Even in the poorest cottage a little green fir branch testified that it was Christmas Eve. Gretchen had been up betimes, and when her grandmother came into the parlour, was sitting with "Miss Mary," in a clean frock, on her lap.

"Well, Gretchen," grannie said, "so Christmas Eve has come at last; father is coming to fetch you after dinner in the sledge, so we had better be quick with breakfast, and then we shall have plenty of time to pack your things, and go and say good-bye to all the neighbours."

Gretchen readily acquiesced, and sat down with goodwill to the tempting little breakfast of steaming coffee and crisp cakes, *which she had helped Hannah to make the*

day before, in honour of Christmas Eve. As soon as the breakfast things were cleared, grannie took the big Bible from the shelf, and calling Gretchen to her, she read the second chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, and then Gretchen sang the little Christmas hymn to her, which she had been preparing to surprise father and mother with.

CHRISTMAS HYMN.

"Christmas Eve has come at last,
That day of all most glad,
For God has sent His Son to us,
We're now no longer sad.

"No longer sad we now can be,
For Christ, our Christ, is here;
The angels sing with joy and praise,
No longer need ye fear.

"For in a lowly manger laid
Is One, who comes to save
From sin, all who to Him will come,
And of Him pardon crave.

"Christmas Eve has come at last,
That day of all most blest;
Now, troubled hearts, all doubts are o'er,
For in our Christ is rest."

"Very nicely sung, dear," grannie said,

when Gretchen had ended. "Are your little socks finished?"

Gretchen had for the last few weeks been busy knitting a little pair of socks, to surprise her mother with on Christmas Eve. She had asked her grandmother what she should make for mother, and grannie had advised giving her a surprise with a little pair of socks. Gretchen had suggested that mother could not wear them; but grannie said it would take too long to knit a pair of stockings to fit mother, who would, no doubt, find some use for the socks.

To grannie's question, Gretchen answered, that she had finished them, and would fetch them, to let grannie see if they were all right. She soon returned with a little white parcel, which, when opened, revealed a neat little pair of blue and white striped socks. Grannie, having duly admired, told Gretchen to go and put on her pelisse and hood, for she was going to visit some of her neighbours, and waited to take Gretchen with her.

When they returned from their numerous

visits dinner was on the table, and after dinner grannie brought out a brown paper parcel from the cupboard, and told Gretchen to open it.

"It feels so hard, grannie; what can it be?" Gretchen said, feeling all over the parcel before she opened it. "I can't undo the string; I will fetch my scissors first."

Snap went the string, and out of the brown paper parcel fell a pair of bright new skates.

"Oh, grannie!" Gretchen exclaimed, jumping about with joy. "Are these for Hans? What will he say! Oh! grannie, how did you manage to get them?"

"Three questions in one breath, Gretchen! 'Are they for Hans?' I give them to you; you may do what you like with them. 'What will Hans say?' I can't tell, as he hasn't got them yet. 'How did I manage to get them?' Hannah drove over in a sledge this morning to Goslar, with some of Herr Löbbecke's servants, who had commissions to do there. Now are you satisfied?"

"Oh! grannie, they are quite beautiful.

I think I should like to run over with them to Hans just now, or I have a better plan: we will wrap them up, and Hannah can go with them this evening, and only say, 'The Christchild sent them. Oh, dear! how surprised he will be!' And Gretchen capered about the room, but suddenly stopped, and gave one cry of joy as a sledge stopped at the little gate. "Oh, father! Father has come!" and she bounded to the door.

Herr Härtel had his little daughter in his arms in a minute; but grannie, fearful lest Gretchen should catch cold without anything on, persuaded them both to come within doors.

"Well, Gretchen, are you ready to come home?" Herr Härtel asked.

"Oh, yes, father!" and then, looking at grannie, "Oh! grannie, my things are not packed yet."

Grannie laughed.

"No; we have been so busy to-day, we have not managed to pack yet, but that important business will not take very long. *Karl*," (turning to her son) "you might put

up the sledge and horse for about an hour. and rest a little."

Herr Härtel agreed, and Gretchen ran off to look after "Miss Mary's" wardrobe, while grannie followed in a few minutes to pack up Gretchen's more important toilette in the neat little trunk her mother had sent with her.

When they returned to the parlour, Gretchen jumped upon her father's knee, and chattered away to him till he said he thought his little daughter's tongue must have grown an inch since he last saw her, while grannie kept flitting backwards and forwards.

Hannah brought in coffee and cakes at about half-past three, and then Herr Härtel said—

"Now, Gretchen, we must be off. Go and put on your things, while I get the horse harnessed."

Hannah helped Gretchen to dress, every now and then declaring the house would not be the same after the darling lamb had gone.

The sledge was at the door, and Gretchen turned to say good-bye to grannie—

"Good-bye, dear, dear grannie. I will come back very soon."

Grannie smiled, while Herr Härtel laughed out loud.


"I say, Gretchen, mother told me to bring grannie back with me to-day, if you could make room for her in the sledge," and then Gretchen saw that grannie had her cloak and hood on.

"Yes, Gretchen," she said, "I have given Hannah leave to go home ; so it only remains to be seen if you will make room for me."

Make room for grannie ! Gretchen would have stood the whole way to have grannie with her. So in they all got, Herr Härtel in front, and Gretchen and grannie in the back seat. It was pretty dark as they drove along, and Gretchen whispered to grannie—

"Grannie, think of the poor little Christ-child lying to-night in the cold manger. I wonder if there was snow on the ground !"

And while they were driving homewards over the snowy road, Hans sat at his aunt's miserable little fire, trying to get some *warmth into his fingers*, the big tears coming



into his eyes, as he thought of last Christmas Eve, when the tree had blazed with lights, and the Christchild had not forgotten him.

"Aunt," he said, "the Christchild does not care for poor boys, only for rich ones."

"Hush, boy, hush! He cares for all, but we must be patient." And then the thought of brighter, happier days came across her also, and she felt inclined to cry, too; but for the boy's sake she restrained her tears, and tried to be cheerful, and then she said, "Oh! Hans, it will be easier to bear if we pray to God," and she knelt with the boy and prayed, "O God, bless Hans, and bless me. Help us to bear our trials patiently, and let better days come soon, for Jesus Christ's sake. Hark, Hans! did I not hear something?" she said, as they rose from their knees. "Yes, surely; there was a knock at the door. Go and open it: perhaps some poor person, poorer than ourselves, looking for shelter."

Quickly Hans obeyed the summons, and opened, but no one was at the door; only Hans almost stumbled over a big parcel

lying on the door-step. With trembling hands he carried it into the little room, and, by the dim light of the fire read these words written on it:—“*For Hans and his aunt, from the Christchild.*” Eagerly his fingers undid the string and paper wrapping, and then, with a cry of joy, he hid his face in his aunt’s lap, and cried, “Oh! auntie, auntie, how could I say the Christchild did not love poor boys. He has sent me just what I wished for.”

Yes, there was a pair of new skates, bright and beautiful, and there was no mistaking the words, “*For Hans;*” but the paper parcel had more wonders to reveal, in the shape of a pair of warm stockings, ticketed, “*For Hans’ aunt,*” and a large cake, “*For Hans and his aunt.*”

Oh! that was a happy Christmas Eve. Hans could not take his eyes off the skates. His aunt drew on the pair of new stockings, and then, as she had still a little coffee in the house, she made the kettle boil, and they drank warm, steaming coffee, and ate *part of the cake*; and here we must leave

them enjoying their good cheer, and return to Gretchen.

It was quite dark before the sledge stopped at the schoolmaster's little house ; but almost before Gretchen and her grandmother could alight the door was thrown open, and Gretchen was clasped in her mother's arms, and then all the travellers (as Herr Härtel called them) were led into the little parlour, where the bright light of the lamp almost dazzled them after the outer darkness.

"How well you look child!" were the first words her mother said. "Are you very hungry? because, if not, I want you first to go to the blue-room."

The blue-room was a room only used on great festal occasions, such as Christmas Eve, and Gretchen trembled all over with delight as she remembered the new frock promised her by the Christchild.

"Gretchen, you lead the way," Herr Härtel said; "and grannie, mother, and I will follow."

On tripped Gretchen in front, the others following more leisurely, till she reached the

door, and then she hesitated a moment before opening it.

“Open the door,” Herr Härtel called; “there is nothing to be seen from outside.”

Then she pressed the handle, and what a blaze of light met her gaze! it quite bewildered her at first. In the centre of the room stood the Christmas-tree, almost reaching to the ceiling, one blaze of light, and sparkling with coloured bonbons and chains of gold and silver.

On little tables round the room were arranged presents for everyone, from grannie down to Elsbeth, the servant. Gretchen’s table stood at one side of the window, and on it was actually the long-promised dress, and a perfect tower of gingerbread, apples, and nuts, besides a score of other things, which it would take too long to describe.

But Gretchen did not see all this at first: no, even the green dress was ignored; for something else met her gaze, which so startled her as to make her forget everything besides.

At one end of the room was a small

recess, where usually a work-table stood, but now it had been arranged with wreaths of evergreen and branches of fir so as to look a bower of green. Tapers blazed on the branches, and little waxen angels, suspended by silver thread, fluttered hither and thither. Over the recess hung a coloured picture of the Christchild, in its mother's arms; and the Christchild seemed to smile down upon some object lying almost hidden in the bower of green. It was this something—namely, a little cradle, with white muslin curtains, looped up with pink satin bows—that startled Gretchen. Holding her breath, she advanced on tiptoe, and peeped in.

Yes, there among the white coverlets lay the dearest little baby you can imagine. Gretchen could see nothing at first but a little pink and white bundle, and one little fat arm lying on the coverlet. The baby's eyes were shut; it was sleeping.

"Oh! grannie, the Christchild has come here; the Christchild has come here! Won't we take care of him now!"

"No, Gretchen, not the Christchild," said

grannie, who had drawn near to see how Gretchen would receive the surprise; "but the Christchild's little brother. Will you love it very much for His sake?"

"Oh yes, grannie! how could I help loving Christ's little brother?"

Dear children, my story is finished. Will you, like little Gretchen, remember that you are all the Lord Jesus', little brothers and sisters, and then when you feel tempted to speak crossly to one another, remember that you are being cross to a little sister or brother of Jesus, and that He has said to us:—

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

A TALE
OF THE 31ST OF DECEMBER.

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CHAPTER I.

IT was the 31st of December, the weather was cold and frosty, but who cared for that as long as they had a cozy fire to sit at, and a roof over their heads? At least we did not, for as the clock struck ten, the appointed hour for us to assemble round the fireside and sit together waiting till the old year had died out, it found us all standing before my father's library door waiting impatiently till he should have finished counting up those horrid bills which must be made up before the "New Year," for to disturb my father would have been a terrible crime in our family. At last we heard his voice summoning us all to enter. We did not need twice bidding, but rushed in, and each took

his or her accustomed place round the fire-side. I, as being the youngest and most privileged, took my seat between father and mother. I was twelve at that time, and attended the academy of the village of G. and, as I had only done so for a year, considered myself a good step advanced in manhood since the last 31st of December, when I had taken my place there.

“Now, father,” cried my eldest sister, after we were all comfortably seated; “now for the story you promised to tell us.”

My father smiled at our eager faces, and said, “My tale is called ‘The Old Ruins,’” and thus he began:—

“It was late one Monday night; the preceding day had been a wonderfully fine one; but as the night closed in the sky was clouded over with dark, black clouds, which threatened soon a storm, for it was already towards the close of the month of December. Every one had returned within their dwellings who had one to go to; for on the 31st of December, just such a night as this one, who would *have liked to be absent from home?* The

blinds of the houses were pulled down, and the shutters closed, so as not even to let the light and comfort within be revealed to those without. But there was one place where no such precaution was required—some old ruins, which stood far back from any other habitation for miles round: they could not be seen either, for gigantic trees rose on all sides, leaving them quite alone in their grandeur. But on the night of which I speak the spot was not quite so deserted as usual; it was not uninhabited. A small fire was burning in the only niche where any shelter from the coming storm could be attained—namely, under a projecting piece of wall, which looked as if it had once belonged to a turret, but had crumbled away with age. Round the fire were crouched four or five gipsies. A middle-aged man and woman and a lovely little child, of about eight years old, were the most conspicuous of the party. It was about this child they seemed to be discussing.

“‘What is the use,’ said the woman, ‘of taking this child with us any farther? For more than half a year I have dragged her

about with us, and of what good has she been? None. The victuals are dear, so I propose leaving her here; she will be picked up by some one or other.'

"'No,' replied the man hastily. 'Many a one has given me a piece of money because of the child, and her singing, too, has often won us a morsel of bread. I'm for taking her with us. If it did not look so stormy we might continue our way; for (and he dropped his voice) it strikes me it was hereabouts we took up lodgings after we stole the child, and we might still be traced—what think ye?'

"'To-night let us remain here,' answered the woman. 'We may go many a mile before reaching such a resting-place. Come, let us take our supper, and then lie down and sleep.'

"While the man and woman had been speaking, the child had not uttered a single word: her little eyes were fast closing with weariness, for they had made a long journey that day, and at last she sank into a quiet *slumber*. The woman wrapped her up in a

thin shawl, and laid her slight form down on the grass. An hour afterwards the whole band was sleeping. Sweet was the sleep of the child, though every now and then a troubled expression would come over the young face, and a half sob burst from her little breast. Perhaps she was thinking of a dear mother, who had tended her infancy and knelt by her little cot. The sleep of the afore-mentioned man was restless; many a time he started, or murmured incoherent words; at last he became quieter, and he dreamt. He dreamt that the little child bent over him, with tear-stained face, and implored him to take her home. He thought he repulsed her roughly, and she turned and fled. Then he saw an angel approaching him: the angel was like his mother he knew so long ago, when he was a better man than he was now. She did not look angry, but cast a reproachful glance on him, then led him by the hand from the ruins along a weary road; and though he felt tired, and would gladly have thrown himself down on the grass, the angel would not allow it, but

led him further and further. Suddenly she left him, and in the distance far away he saw the little child he had so roughly repulsed sitting on the lap of a lovely lady; but as soon as she saw the gipsy her face turned pale, and she pointed to him. The man woke with a start, and stared wildly around him, half expecting to find the child no longer. The bells were ringing the Old Year out—the bells from the old tower of the church in the nearest town. They rang so clear and distinctly, and still so solemnly, as if wishing to tell all that a year—a year which could never be recalled—was passed for ever. The child was not fled, as the man had dreamed: no, she sat upright in the thin little shawl, beside the dying-out embers of the fire. She was listening to the tolling bells, and her little hands were clasped in prayer. ‘Father,’ she prayed, ‘forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,’ and then great tears rolled down her pale little cheeks as she murmured, ‘Father, Thy will be done.’ It was the first time the little *one had prayed* since she had been among

the gipsy band, and the first time she did so it was to pray to her Father to forgive her enemies. The tolling of the bell had recalled to her mind that very time last year, when she had sat in her own dear home, and had prayed to God to give His little child work to do in His vineyard, and He had granted her request. She was to soften the heart of a hardened sinner, whose conscience had been sleeping. The gipsy rose and approached the child ; she started, and that look of terror that had overspread her face in his dream was depicted there again.

“ ‘What were you saying, child ?’ he said. His voice was not harsh, but sad, and struck painfully on the child’s ear. ‘What made you wish God to forgive your enemies ?’

“ ‘Oh !’ she said, and she turned her sweet face to his haggard one. It was long since she had spoken of such sacred things to any one. ‘Last year, as the Old Year was dying out, mamma took me on her knee, and said, “My little one, see how many good things God has given you—good parents and a warm home, and what have you done for

Him?" And as I did not answer she said, "Shall we pray that He will give His little child work to do in His vineyard?" And she knelt down beside me and prayed.'

"The gipsy did not answer for some moments, then he said—

"'Child, come, you shall go to your home. Here is a thick shawl. Walk softly on the grass, that you do not awake anyone. Follow me.'

"He led her round to the other side of the ruins, where his donkey was attached, and, unloosing it from a tree, placed the child on its back. Emerging from the wood, he led her along the road—the very road he had seen in his dream. Many miles they went, and heeded not the falling snow. The gipsy never rested once on the way, nor did he speak to the child; it seemed as if she was acting the part of the angel to him. But oh! how thankful were both, after a journey of two hours, to see lights in the distant town; then the child sprang from *her seat*, and seemed for the first time to *awake to a sense of where she was*:

“ ‘ Oh ! there is home ! ’ she cried.

“ My story is not much longer,” my father said. “ Suffice it to say, that on that night she was restored to her parents ; their lost child was found ; on that New Year’s night their little one was given back to them.”

“ And the gipsy ? ” we all cried in a breath.

“ The gipsy was gone, and he could not be traced, after having left the child at the door of her home.”

“ Oh, father, is that the end ? ” we all cried, disappointed.

“ No,” said my father. “ But I am afraid it is too sad ; however, if you wish it I will continue.”

“ The next New Year came round, and on that very night the gipsy slept again in the ruins, and once more in his dream he saw the angel. She led him along the same road ; but when she left him he saw that the little child was in her arms, and though he strove to approach it, he could not. The gipsy started, this time more violently than he had done the time before ; when he

had dreamed of the angel, it seemed to him as if he *must* see that child once more. Not many hours afterwards he was standing at the door of her home begging for admittance.

“In the darkened room of a large and beautiful house lay a little child on a soft, red velvet sofa, which was drawn close to the window, that she might see the bright stars. For many weeks she had lain on a bed of sickness, unconscious of all around her; and when the fever left her she was so weak that the doctor on his daily visit only shook his head gravely; but on that New Year’s Eve a longing had come to the child once to leave her bed and to be allowed to lie on the sofa, where she could watch the stars. The whole family was gathered round her couch. She did not speak for a long time, and then she said, ‘Mamma!’

“‘Well, my darling;’ and the tender mother was at her side in an instant.

“‘Mamma, before I leave you all, I *wanted to say something to you. Don’t be sorry, mamma, because I am going away,*

seeing the tears fall fast from her mother's eyes. 'I am so happy. Do you remember last New Year's Eve when God gave you back your little child? I should like to hear the bells tolling once more, as I did last year; and if ever the poor gipsy was to come back, tell him I forgave him all, and give him this,'—she laid her little Testament in her mother's hand. 'Show him these words, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Oh! I would have liked to have seen him once more.'

"The child sank back on her pillow, exhausted with a fit of coughing, and shut her eyes wearily. The door was pushed open roughly; but the mother's 'hush' did not prevent a man pushing his way past the butler, and crying, 'I tell you, I *will* see the child.'

"The little one, startled with the noise, opened her eyes, and as they rested upon the figure of the man, she cried, 'Oh, there is the gipsy! God has heard my prayer; I have seen him once more.' Tears filled her eyes, and she stretched out her arms to

him. He took her little, thin white hand reverently between his great brown ones, and told her how in his dream he had seen her, and felt he must see her once more.

“When the bells were tolling that night a little spirit had left this world of care and sorrow, and had entered her Father’s kingdom.


“Many were the mourners on earth, who knelt round the couch whence the departed spirit had fled. Some days afterwards the little one was carried to her last resting-place. A gipsy bore the little coffin, and laid it in a niche of the old ruins. The little angel-child had begun her New Year in Heaven.”

My father finished speaking, and my mother was weeping.

“Who was the little one?” I whispered.

My father answered not, but pointed to the picture of our little sister over the mantelpiece; and my mother murmured, “*The little one who has gone before.*”

We sat for many minutes in deep thought,



then my father seemed to wake up from a reverie, and said, "Come, children, wrap yourselves up warmly, I have ordered the carriage to conduct us to the old ruins."

We were ready in a few minutes, and waited in the hall with the greatest impatience, till the carriage came round to the door. I was one of the first to spring in. As I gazed on the stars that New Year's night my heart was very full. The story of my little sister had awaked new feelings in my heart; hardly one of us spoke the whole long drive. I once ventured to ask my father, "Where is the gipsy?"

He smiled sadly, and said, "I dare say you will see him soon enough;" and I asked no further.

Everything was exactly as my father had described it, the long road, then the wood, and, lastly, the ruins, surrounded by the large trees. I fancied I could see the gipsy band sitting round their fire, and the pale face of my little sister lifted so entreatingly to the gipsy. When all the others had

visited the grave, and went to examine the ruins a little further, I remained behind: how many good resolutions I resolved to make for the closing year; how I determined to follow the footsteps of that little angel-sister! Just then the bells began to toll,—my Old Year was flying quickly past,—then I knelt on the grave of my little sister, and with my hands clasped, I begged my heavenly Father to help me in my difficulties in the coming year, and to forgive the sins of the past; and when I had finished I heard a deep voice say “Amen.” I turned; it was our old gardener.

“Sir,” he said, “that child brought me to my Saviour more than fifteen years ago.” And so I learnt to know who the gipsy had been.

Years have fled by; but the memory of my little angel-sister has never passed from my remembrance. In danger and difficulty I would seek her grave, and would leave it refreshed and comforted. The last time I *visited it was on New Year’s Eve with my bride. I led her there, and whilst the bells*

were tolling, I told her the story of that little angel-sister far above the clouds. No flowers were growing around the little grave; but I plucked a leaf of the creeping ivy, which grew on the old tower wall, and laid it in my bride's hand. It was my first gift to her. We have been in many a foreign land; but that little leaf always came with us from place to place. Our gardener is our constant companion, for he says my wife is the most like my little sister; and I think he must be right there. He is getting old and feeble now. He told me he dreamt the other night that the angel he saw so long ago visited him once more, and he caught a glimpse of the child smiling on him from above, and she beckoned him to come, so he feels sure it will not be long now before he sees her again; and I have promised to lay him beside my little angel-sister in the old ruins.

THE END.

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